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The Old Morris House  
Morris Cove  
New Haven, Connecticut

HABS No. Conn. 27

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Connecticut

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Harold H. Davis, District Officer  
29 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Conn.

## THE OLD MORRIS HOUSE

New Haven, New Haven County, Conn.

Owner: New Haven Colony Historical Society, New Haven, Conn.

Date of Erection: Original Building: 1680  
Additions: 1767  
Burned by British: 1779  
Restorations 1780-85  
1915

Architect or Builder: John Morris

Present Condition: Good

Number of Stories: Two and one-half

Materials of Construction: Frame  
Clapboard exterior with stone ends  
Field stone foundations  
Stone chimneys forming part of end walls  
Plain pitch roof shingled  
Interior paneling and wainscoting

Other Existing Records: Colonial Dames Series "Old Houses of  
Connecticut"

## List of Photographs:

1. West Elevation
2. South Elevation
3. Detail of Stairs
4. China Cupboard-Northwest room of first floor
5. Mantel in Northwest room of first floor
6. End of Southeast room of first floor
7. East End of Living Room
8. West End of Ball Room
9. General View of Room under Ball Room (facing east)
10. Southwest view of Carriage Shed

## THE OLD MORRIS HOUSE, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT



THE MORRIS MANSION

## THE OLD MORRIS HOUSE

MORRIS COVE, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

*Gift of Mr. William S. Pardee  
to The New Haven Colony Historical Society*



**W**HEN John Davenport and Theophilus Eaton formed their company of Puritans in London, Thomas Morris and his wife, Elizabeth, were members of it. The company chartered the ship "Hector", and another vessel, the name of which is not known. They sailed from London probably in April, 1637, as they landed in Boston June 26, 1637.

*Departure  
from London*

Theophilus Eaton with a small company started on an exploration trip August 31st of that year to see for himself the rich meadows at "Quellipioak" (Quinnipiac) River, of which he had heard much. He was so impressed with the conditions he found that he left seven men at Quinnipiac, as New Haven was first called, while he and the others returned to Boston to consult with the rest of their followers. It was decided that all but the seven men at Quinnipiac would spend the winter in Massachusetts. These seven men built a hut near what is now the corner of George and Meadow Streets, and used the long winter months to good advantage in establishing friendly relations with the Indians, and in becoming familiar with the site of their future homes.

*First  
Settlement  
in New  
Haven*

On the 30th of March, 1638, the whole company left Boston on their old ship "Hector", and landed in Quinnipiac about two weeks later. They sailed up West Creek and disembarked near the corner of the present George and College Streets. One of the first tasks of the planters was to decide upon the plan of the town. Eight squares were laid out around a central one which was called the "Commons" or "Market Place". Lots were assigned to all of the proprietors or free planters, as they were sometimes called. These proprietors had a financial interest in the undertaking and many of their lots were in the original eight squares. In addition, small lots were gratuitously given to thirty-two householders who were not yet able to invest money in the Plantation. Most of these small lots were

*Home Lots  
Assigned to  
Planters*

Approved:

*Harold H. Davis.*

*JW 9/16/37*

west of West Creek, but a few were laid out on East Water Street, which, at that time, was called "Ye bank side". Thomas Morris was assigned one of the Water Street lots between Olive and Chestnut Streets.

*Oyster-shell  
Field*

We do not know just when Thomas Morris began to consider acquiring land at Solitary Cove (Morris Cove) as he took the land assigned to him in the second division in the old "Oyster-shell Field", which was south of the present State Street. This was not very far from his home lot. He also had land in the third division at Dragon, the old name for Fair Haven.

*"Ye Gunns at  
Blacke Rocke"*

In the New Haven Colonial Records for April 11th, 1653, Thomas Morris is one of a committee to see about "planting gunns at Blacke Rocke". Black Rock is near the present ruins of Fort Hale. Undoubtedly, in attending to his duties in connection with the "gunns", he saw timber in the vicinity well suited to his trade of ship builder. The only available land at that time immediately adjoining Black Rock had been granted to Thomas Gregson in 1644.. A part of the Gregson farm was bought in 1678 by George Pardee, who was the first Pardee ancestor in this country of William Scranton Pardee.

*Thomas Morris  
at  
Solitary Cove*

South of the Gregson land was the little neck of land called Solitary Cove, which, in later years, was named Morris Cove. Thomas Morris applied for this land in 1668, but it was not granted to him until 1671. He died in 1673, so was not able to develop it to any extent. In his will he left it to his three sons, John, Eleazar, and Joseph.

*Indian  
Lands*

John and Eleazar Morris at once began to buy more land in the Solitary Cove meadows and also the Indian Lands as they became available. These lands were on both sides of Townsend Avenue north and northeast of the Cove.

*Ye Mansion  
House built  
by  
Eleazar Morris*

For some reason John Morris decided to move to New Jersey. In 1705 he sold his entire share of the "Little Neck" farm to Eleazar, and, in the deed, mention is made of "Ye mansion house now standing thereon". This is the first reference to a house on the property, but it was undoubtedly built soon after 1680, as Eleazar Morris is not mentioned after that date in any New Haven land transactions, but often as buying more land in Solitary Cove. The construction of the stone walls at each end of the central part of the house also supports this surmise, as they show late seventeenth century workmanship. The oyster shells in the mortar can be seen clearly.

*Old Stone  
Basin*

There is another clew to the date of the first house on the site. By the old well, which formerly was near the south door in the wing, there stood, until recently, a very heavy stone basin with the inscription on the bottom, "J. M. 1688". These initials were, without doubt, those of John Morris. About twenty-five years ago this basin suffered the fate of countless thousands of historical relics which are stolen every year by ignorant and uncaring souvenir hunters, who ultimately throw their ill-gotten finds on the scrap heap.

*Disposal of  
Property  
by Deeds*

Eleazar Morris also had three sons, John, James, and Eleazar. Before his death he deeded half of his two farms, the one at Black Rock and the other at "Morris Neck", to

each of his two sons, John and Eleazar. James was given other property. To his son John he gave the part of the Neek farm on which the old house stood (which is the site of the present house), situated on the west side of the old highway going to South End. To his son Eleazar he gave a new house and land on the east side of the same highway. These deeds are dated 1717.

By 1732 we find Eleazar selling most of his land in Morris Cove to his brother, John, and, at the time of the latter's death, he had sole possession of the farm. John Morris had no children, and, in his will, dated 1744, he left the property to be divided between his two nephews, Daniel and Amos, sons of his brother James. After living there a few years Daniel moved to Great Barrington, Mass., and sold all his land holdings to his brother, Amos. Until after 1850 each will or deed stipulated that land and buildings could be sold only by one brother to another or to their male heirs.

Captain Amos Morris was a stern, devout man of the highest integrity. With his wealth, ability, and influence he was very prominent in East Haven affairs. He had twelve children, who carried the name into many sections of the country.

The oldest part of the house is the central portion between the two stone ends. This plan, with a stone chimney at each end, was not so common in the seventeenth century as the plan with the central chimney. The old kitchen may have been added to the first house as a lean-to. In 1767 Captain Amos Morris added the wing on the south side. This addition is built largely of East Haven sandstone, as contrasted with the granite of the older part. Probably many changes were made at this time in the original house, too, and the family must have been very proud of their new home, which in a few years was doomed to wanton destruction.

On July 5, 1779, the British troops, under General Tryon, invaded New Haven, and all the houses on their line of march through Morris Cove were burned. The Morris House was the first to be fired after they landed at Lighthouse Point. In a letter to the General Assembly Captain Morris states that he was obliged to lodge his large family in a building built for his hogs, until he could rebuild his house. The stone walls and probably many of the heavy beams, which withstood the ravages of the fire, are part of the house as it was rebuilt by Amos Morris in 1780 or 1781. It is possible that the ballroom was added at this time or a few years later. The rebuilding of the house extended over a period of years, as we see by an extract from a deed dated 1785, conveying to his son Amos: "\* \* \* \* one part of the dwelling house I now dwell in viz. all the north end as far as the middle of the entry way with the priveleges of going down sellor in said entry way and also all the north part of the sellor as far as the entry sellor stairs strait across the Sellor except the entry Chamber I reserve to myself if I am a mind to have it when we com to finish the chambers".

In all but two rooms the floors are the original, wide pine boards. The frame work of the house is white oak cut on

*Captain Amos  
Morris  
Inherits  
Estate*

*Captain  
Amos Morris*

*Addition to  
the House*

*British  
Invasion, 1779  
and Fire*

*Construction  
of the House*

the estate. The granite used in the stone ends and chimneys was found on the land, and the oyster shells used in the mortar were burned on the premises and mixed with sand from the beach. The old panelling over the fireplace in one room has been scraped to show the natural wood, and the paint from the old corner cupboard here has also been removed.

*Dining  
Room*

The kitchen in the wing is now a dining room and the lower part of two of the walls is of wide, horizontal wainscoting from the floor to the window sills and rough sandstone above. At one time, it was all wainscoted. The fireplace in this room was originally large enough to burn eight foot logs which were drawn in through the wide door by a horse.

*Old Kitchen*

The old kitchen toward Lighthouse Road is of special interest with its massive beams, Dutch oven, old stone sink, and collection of ancient cooking utensils.

*Secret Closet*

An air of mystery hangs over the little hidden closet in front of one of the chimneys upstairs.

*Small  
Closets*

There are two small closets, with a window in each, opening off the two front rooms downstairs. Mr. Frederick J. Kelly, the architect, suggests that these may have been powder rooms where the men powdered their wigs. Similar rooms have been found in houses elsewhere in New England where it is known positively that such was their use.

*Coach House*

In the Coach House are standing a gig and an unusually fine coach, completing a picture of early days.

*Gift of  
William  
Scranton  
Pardee*

Mr. Pardee's Old Morris House is a splendid example of one of the finest types of early colonial houses, and its preservation is due to the generosity of William Scranton Pardee of New Haven. After being held in the Morris family for almost two hundred and fifty years, it was put on the market in 1915. Mr. Pardee's love and reverence for the old and beautiful prompted his purchase of it. He lived only three years to enjoy the possession of the old mansion, and died before he could put into effect his splendid plans, but in his will he left it to The New Haven Colony Historical Society, with a substantial endowment for its upkeep.

*Close  
Association  
of Pardee  
and Morris  
Families*

The coincidence of the association of the Morris and Pardee families from the earliest days of the Plantation is very interesting. Both the families had their home lots on East Water Street, with their outlying land in the adjoining "Oyster-shell Field". Later, the Morris family established themselves in Morris Cove, followed soon after by the Pardee family, who bought land just north and abutting the Morris land. Over two hundred years later, William, a direct descendant of George Pardee, and a collateral descendant of Thomas Morris, bought the Morris ancestral home from the direct heirs, and by his farsighted vision left it for future enjoyment and inspiration.

